



SHREE SATYANARAIN

74 Narottam Narayan Sharma. *Shree Satyanarain*, 1950S offset print of mid-1930S image. Published by S. S. Brijbasi.

of Brijbasi (the disseminator of the most significant popular style in twentieth-century India): a man enters their shop bearing a photograph of his son dressed as Krishna and asks for it to be framed.

PASTORALISM AND POLITICS

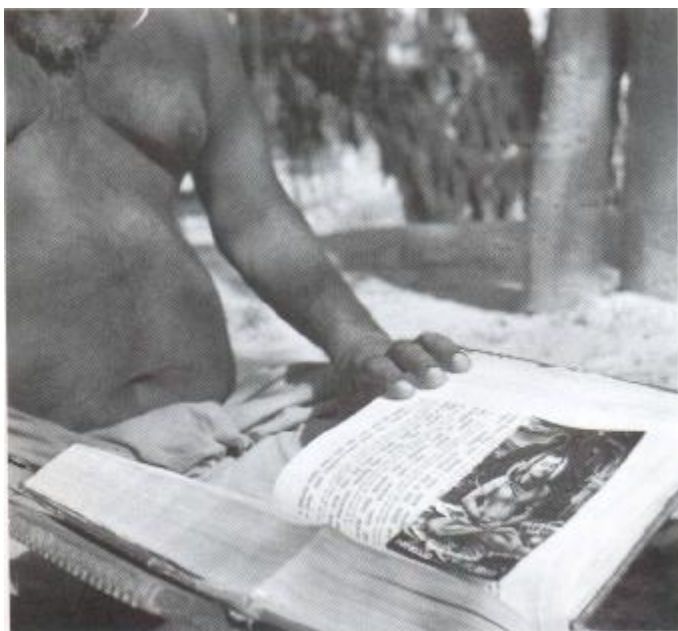
Just as Anderson's newspaper reader is 'continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life' through the observation of 'exact replicas of his own paper being consumed' elsewhere,⁴⁰ it is my suggestion that the Nathdvara-style

chromolithographs that proliferated in the 1930S produced a similar effect through the semiosis created by their inter-ocular and, of course, through their sheer ubiquity. The prints collectively, through their many hundred million acts of consumption, consolidate an internally referential landscape that came to exist in parallel throughout India. We are confronted with not so much a temporal 'traverse'⁴¹ as a spatial shadow, an ideal space and time that runs alongside everyday reality.⁴²

We have already had some sense of the enduring popularity of images such as *Kailash Pati Shankar* through the variety of different versions that have ~\~1:~ ~u m~ " ~Th:~ ~1:~ \~rou \0 Qocument is the way in which images entered everyday spaces. The anthropologist McKim Marriott's photographs from the 1940S and '50S in rural Uttar Pradesh and urban Maharashtra are one of the few records we have of this everyday penetration. A 1952 photograph of a Brijbasi bromide postcard of *Kailash Pati Shankar* placed inside a copy of the *Bhagvata Purana* by a wealthy landlord (illus. 75) allows us to glimpse, through Marriott's lens, one small fragment of the spatial shadow of popular images insinuating themselves into the smallest (indeed thinnest)

everyday spaces. We see here in its purest form the emergence of a new form of authority (the mass-produced visual) in conjunction with the old (the rural 'oralization'⁴³ of texts by learned intermediaries), the local political consequences of which are described in more detail in chapter seven.

Some sense of how, from the late 1920S onwards, Nathdvara landscapes came to do an important part of the work of imagining the nation can also be had from the juxtaposition of images hung on the fa\ade of Brijbasi's office in Karachi in the mid-1930S (illus. 76). Shrinathdasji and Shyamsunderlal Brijbasi are shown seated with their staff in front of the original oil paintings of their best-selling chromolithographs. In addition to portraits of Nehru and Gandhi there are also four images by Narottam: the two images just discussed, *Murli Manohar* and *Kailash Pati Shankar*,



75 Postcard-size bromide print by S. S. Brijbasi of Narottam Narayan's *Kailash Pati Shankar* placed in a copy of the *Bhagvata Purana*, Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh, early 1950S.



76 The staff of S. S. Brijbasi outside the firm's Bunder Road office, Karachi, mid-1930S. Shrinathdasji and Shyamsunderlal are seated in the centre.



77 Narottam Narayan Sharma, *Maharana Pratap*, c. 1944. Published by S. S. Brijbasi.

becomes a camel's head and the guru's head part of its

saddle. Narottam also produced several sketches and paintings of landscapes in which rivers tumbled over, or bubbled alongside, rocks which on closer inspection reveal themselves to be crouching monkeys. These signify Hanuman's monkey army, which, as the *Ramayana* relates, rescued Sita from Lanka and whose actions helped restore the moral universe.

Narottam Narayan's images can be seen as a technician's experiment with a living landscape, in which he tests the capacity of different categories of being to invade and infest each other in a manner that recalls Arcimboldo. At one level this strategy develops a pre-existing concern with the mutually inclusionary capacity of visual forms to encompass the gods, which is apparent, for instance, in the 'Cow with 84 Deities' (illus. 79) and in a remarkable photographic montage of Gandhi (see illus. 100).

Narottam's experiments with the mutual imbrication of different domains are, however, accented in radically different ways. His *monkey-landscape* sketches are a positive affirmation of the Nathdvara pastoral aesthetic in which a figural excess signifies a religious repleteness. The monkey-landscapes work not through substitution but through addition - the river remains a river but is then revealed to be *also* a river *and* fragments of Ram's army. The monkey



78 Unfinished sketch by Narottam Narayan Sharma, c. 1940.

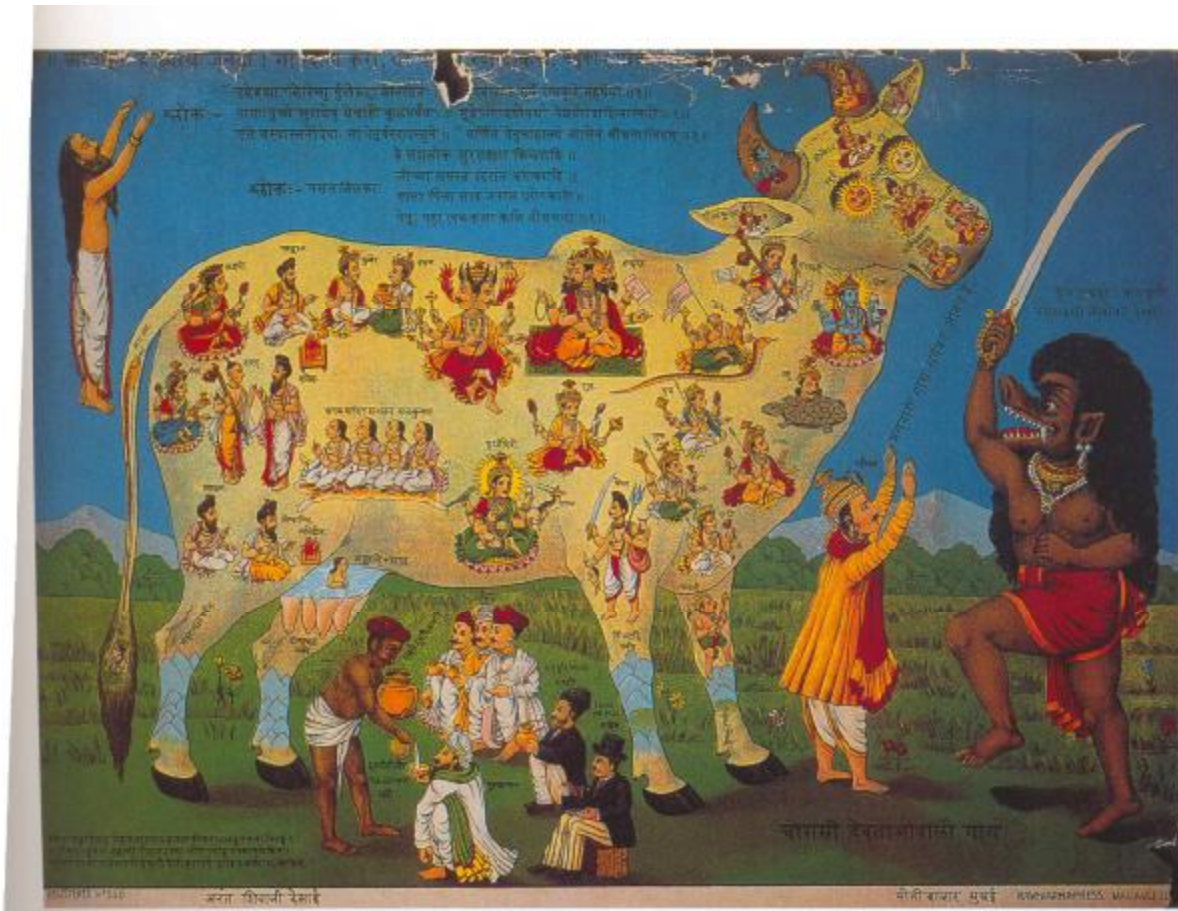
landscapes thus exemplify a crucial quality of the figural density and multivalency of Nathdvara imagery. Narottam translates the task of representation from the modelling of objects within a three-dimensional space as a field of certainty (the colonial aspiration) into the presentation of cryptic elements on the picture plane. Depth is rejected in favour of the complexity of surface and clarity rejected in favour of uncertainty.

'NATIONAL FEELING'

My antiquarian enthusiasm for the work of artists such as Narottam and publishers such as Brijbasi might be read as an obscure argument about some obscure pictures. But I believe that they lay the foundation for some grander claims about nationalism, or as I would prefer to call it, following many nationalists' own usage, 'national feeling'.

Benedict Anderson's model of *nationalism-like* nearly all theories of nationalism - is a bigly cerebral! construct invoking flows of discourses in a world stripped of its materiality. Recent criticisms⁵² have objected to its assumption that a 'modular' nationalism was reproduced globally (a claim that Anderson retracts in the second edition of *Imagined Communities*), and the elitism implicit in his stress on the cognitive dimensions of nationalist 'imaging', arguing instead for a subaltern messianic nationalism.

It is possible, however, to push these criticisms much further, and to edge to the centre of the nationalist stage a dangerous corporeality that 'national feeling' invokes.⁵³ Although in India, as elsewhere, nationalism had a life as a discourse, it also operated through the libidinous force fields that flowed around various embodiments. Embodiment is indeed crucial to the idea of the nation, embodiment in the form variously of gender, visual symbol, visual style, or sound. Nationalism indeed might be defined as culture materialized and embodied in the service of identity. I have already alluded to the argument that



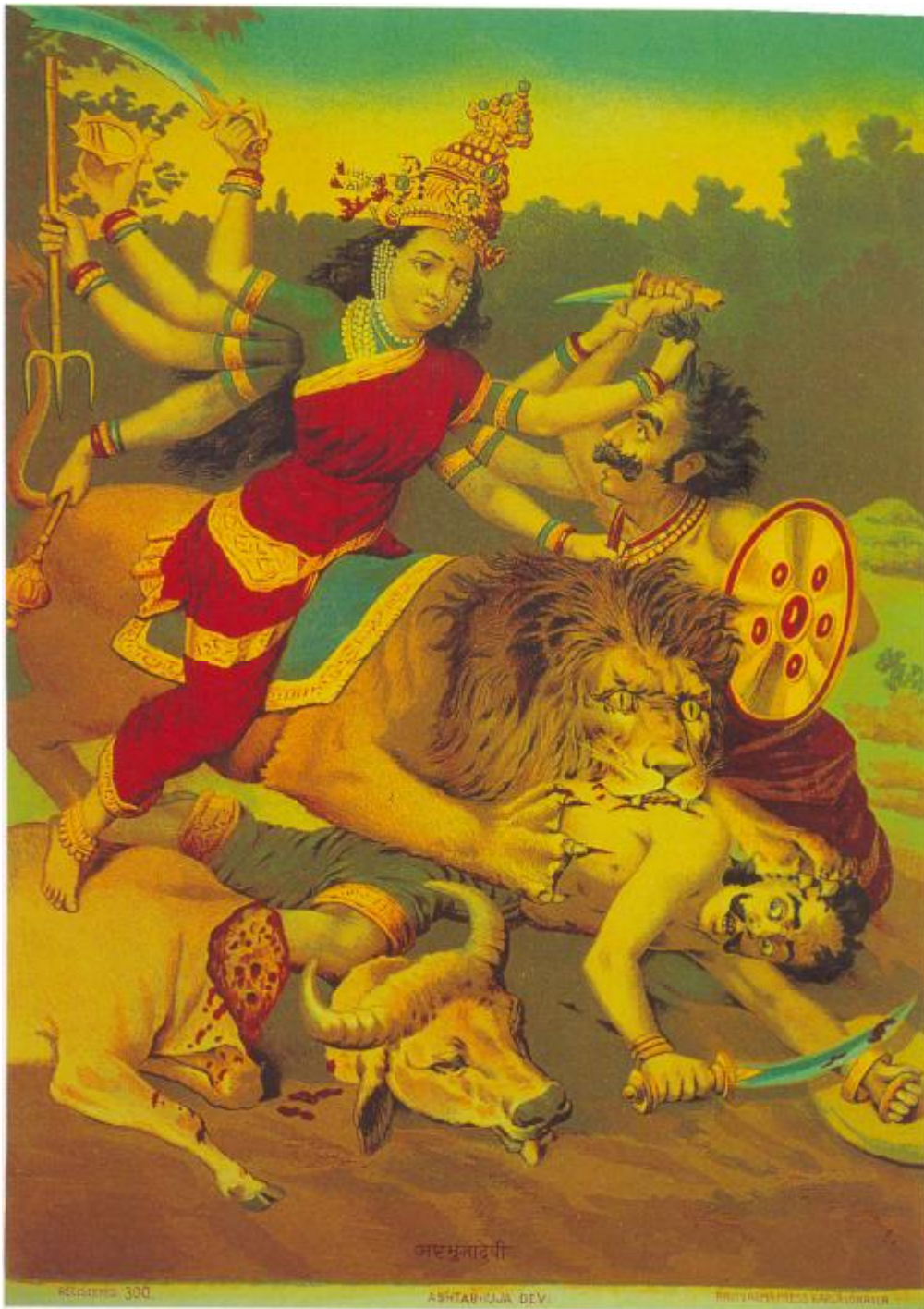
79 Chaurasi Devata Auvall Gay (the Cow with 84 Deities), c. 1912, Ravi Varma Press. The original image.

We can see here - in the use of the didactic image and its exegesis - the appropriation of missionary techniques of propaganda,¹⁷ as befits a movement started by Dayanand Saraswati, who applied missionary rhetoric to Hindu concerns. Freitag notes that in addition to the distribution of pictures at meetings, plays were also staged and placards and pamphlets distributed.⁸

WORKING WITH THE 1910 PRESS ACT

The colonial state's response to the 'increasing activity of controversy' was the 1910 Press Act, which

would become the chief means of controlling the 'native press' and the huge upsurge of topical broadsheets and visual images.⁹ The colonial state's paranoia about the representational genii it had unleashed was expressed not only through the proscription of complete images but also in a prohibition of individual elements of images in an attempt to mitigate their power. However, although the colonial state could quite easily prohibit it could not interdict, since it could not unsay what it had itself helped to create and authorize. Proscription thus operated within a double-bind in which every denial was simultaneously a rein scription of representational potency: to proscribe was also to specify a



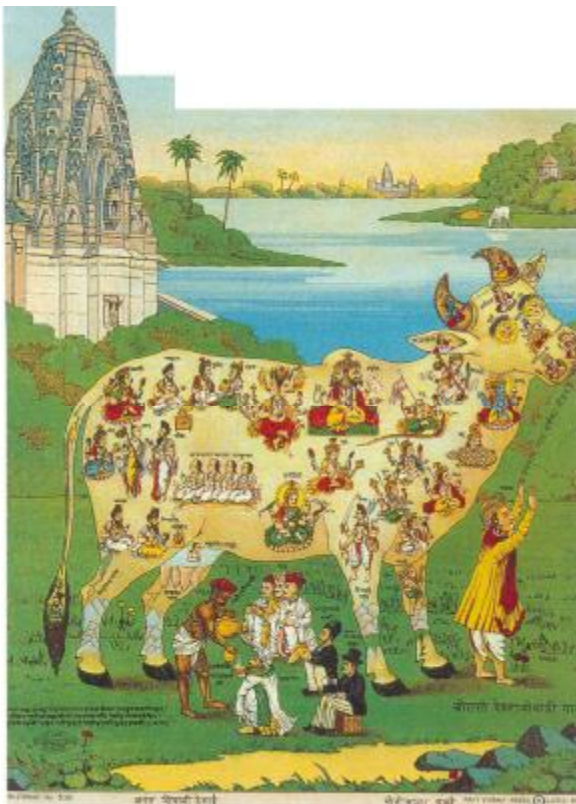
80 *Ashtabhuja Devi*, the original Ravi Varma Press chromolithograph.

figure with the sword who has just slain the buffalo/cow and upon whom the lion wreaks vengeance. In the absence of clear textual knowledge among the popular consumers of this image a reading that constructs it as the goddess's retribution upon two Muslim or Untouchable butchers who have just slaughtered a cow seems highly plausible.

The precise nature of the agreement reached between Schleicher and the Government indicates that those who sought to proscribe it had a clear sense of the deliberate mis-recognition that the image was seeking to provoke. Following advice to the Government that they were likely to be unsuccessful in their prosecution, they proposed that if Schleicher consented to 'make certain alterations in the pictures' and

withdrew his suit they would pay compensation for the pictures seized earlier by the police. In return Schleicher agreed that in future copies of the picture 'the blood stains on the sword of one of the two men will be removed and the animal will be coloured black'. Schleicher did this and the print was quickly reissued with these marginal changes (illus. 82).

A similar undertaking²⁵ was given in respect of another Ravi Varma Press picture that we have already seen (see illus. 79). This was but the latest in a line of similar images stretching back two decades, and under the terms of the compromise Schleicher agreed that in future copies 'the figure of the demon in front of the cow shall be removed'. Shortly thereafter a similar print was issued, this time in vertical portrait format, in which Dharmaraj beseeches the empty void where once the swordwielding demon stood (illus. 81).

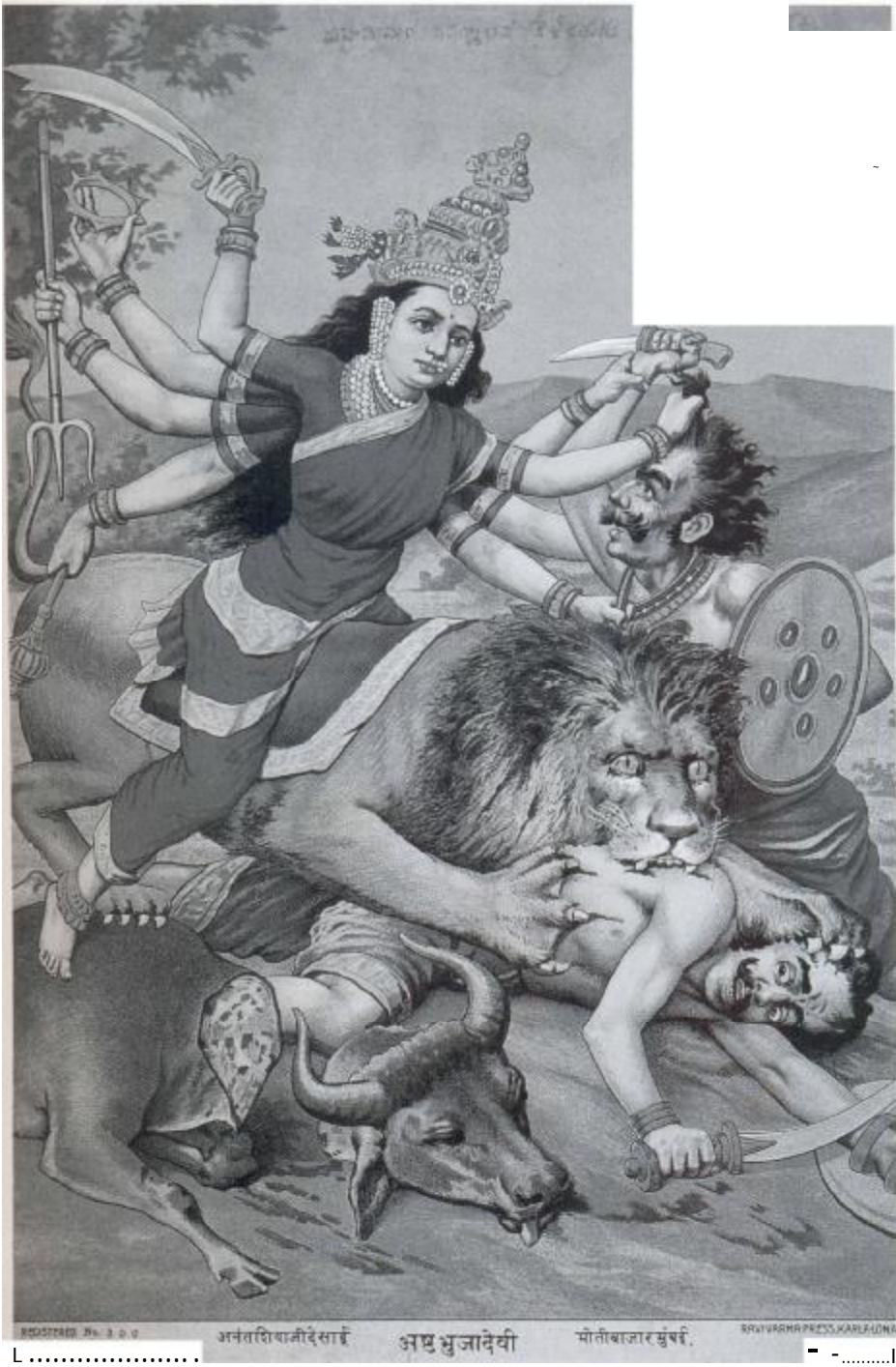


81 The amended version of the Ravi Varma Press *Chaurasi Devata Auvali* Gay (see illus. 80).

NATIONAL ALLEGORY AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL FIGURE

... if it is through the historian one learns of national destiny, the paradigmatic figure of the national community is the artist.²⁶

In early Calcutta lithography (for instance depictions of Nala Damayanti), and in the disputed Ravi Varma Press images described above, it is clear that the nation is invoked primarily through allegory. This is an allegory open to 'linguistic' decoding and was highly susceptible to colonial control. Within a few decades, however, it was superseded by what we might term 'figure' or the affective. In part, this history was determined by .dialectical constraint: figural affective intensities required the semiotic infrastructure of allegory and other political significations, which of necessity had recourse to substitution. Once allegory has done its laborious work, figure could transform these associations into immediate identifications.



82 Ashrabhuja Devi, the revised Ravi Varma Press chromolithograph.

Allegory offers the theoretical possibility of closure. 'Meanings' can be specified and secured: producers and consumers can agree (or rather attempt to agree) that under the prevailing code a particular sign stands in for another sign. This is the basic mechanism of allegory, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains as the 'description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance'.

Bharat Uddhar, a proscribed image from 1931 (illus. 83), presupposed knowledge of its missing allegorical referent: the story of Markandey. Images produced by Chitrashala and the Ravi Varma Press (illus. 84)



BHARATUDDHAR.

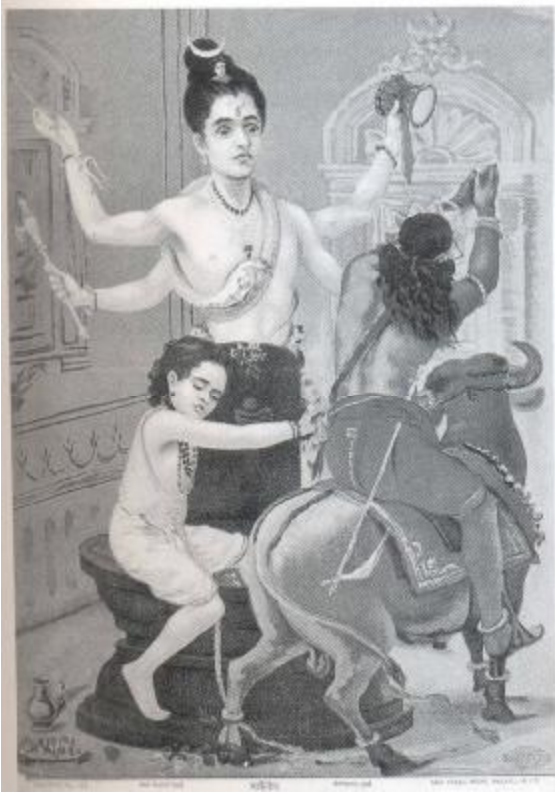
83 *Bharat Uddhar*. Prabhu Dayas. Published by Shyam Sunder La!, Cawnpore. A proscribed image in which Gandhi saves Mother India from the depredations of colonial rule.

depicting Shiv saving the young Markandey from Yam, the lord of the dead astride a buffalo, had circulated widely since the 1880s. *Bharat Uddhar* appropriated this basic structure but substituted Mother India for Markandey, British Rule for Yam, and Gandhi for Shiv. With foreknowledge of the Markandey image, the viewer of *Bharat Uddhar* could readily translate the one narrative into the other.

Allegory's referentiality was certainly presumed by the colonial state, and its method of surveillance was (to use Dan Sperber's term) 'cryptological', that is predicated on the assumption that signs could be decoded for their 'true' meanings.²⁷ Thus Kunja Behari Gangopadhyaya's early twentieth-century Bengali drama *Matri Puja* was 'a seditious allegory on the present political situation of the country',²⁸ despite being 'ostensibly founded on a well-known incident of Hindu mythology';

But the colonial state was also *ethnographical*-concerned with audiences' reception of signs, seeking confirmation in the ability of the wider audience to decode the 'message': 'It will be clear from the newspaper criticisms printed at the end of the book that it has been generally understood as referring "to many present day political and social ideas"',⁹

Many Home Political Department proscription orders describe pictures under a cryptological rubric,³⁰ assuming that the image can be disassembled and its signs checked off against their presumed referents. Alongside court judgements on the 'meanings' of contentious images, there are a number of remarkable adjudications on seditious poems and plays in which colonial judges turn their hands to practical criticism, minutely analysing the possible intentions and effects of words and phrases.



84 Markandey, c. 1900. Ravi Varma Press. The mythological template for the previous image.

OF STAMPS, DHOTIS AND THE EVERYDAY

Popular anti-colonial interventions appear to have created an increasingly congested circulation of signs continually available to public recall in this semi-otically saturated domain of the everyday. **In** this circulation, events and their representations criss-crossed media - from lithograph to theatre, from theatre to cinema, from cinema to leaflet, a pattern with which the reader will by now be familiar.

In July 1930 the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee issued stamps bearing the words 'Boycott British Goods' with the intention that its supporters would affix these to envelopes and postcards. The colonial state's response to these

'boycott stamps' was to throw into stark relief the difficulties it faced in regulating the visual 'everyday'.

Initially it appeared that there would be no objection to the use of such stamps. The Bombay Presidency Postmaster told the *Indian Daily Mail* on 4 July that 'You can write anything you like on your cover. If you like you may even affix your photograph to it. So long as it bears our usual stamp there can be no objection.' Such indifference caused concern to others in the Government and legal clarification was sought as to whether the slogan ('Boycott British Goods') might be considered 'seditious', 'scurrilous' or 'grossly offensive' under the relevant section of the Post Office Act. The advice given indicated that the Government could act if it wished, but it would then also have to proscribe slogans such as 'Shop with Selfridges'. Extensive correspondence between the Home Political Department and the Bombay Postmaster General ensued, and suggestions for further legislation were made before the Legal Department again pointed out the difficulties of isolating these specific stamps in any new proscription. 'I have found great difficulty' opined D. G. Mitchell, 'in devising a formula which is free from obvious objection':

I have tried several variants of the term 'political significance', but could not find one which did not cover harmless activities. . . The difficulties may be seen from a consideration of the following actual cases - or probable cases (1) Photographs of Mr. Gandhi with no accompanying text; (2) reproductions of the 'national flag'; (3) the device of the Overseas League, from whom I have just received a communication; (4) an open post-card soliciting a vote at an election; (5) post-cards bearing the slogan 'Vote for Swaraj' (or any other political cause); (6) the device on the envelopes of the P. & O. [Company]



85 *Bharat Ki Lut*. Devnarayan Varma. A proscribed image from 1930: an engorged and rapacious England loots a starving India.

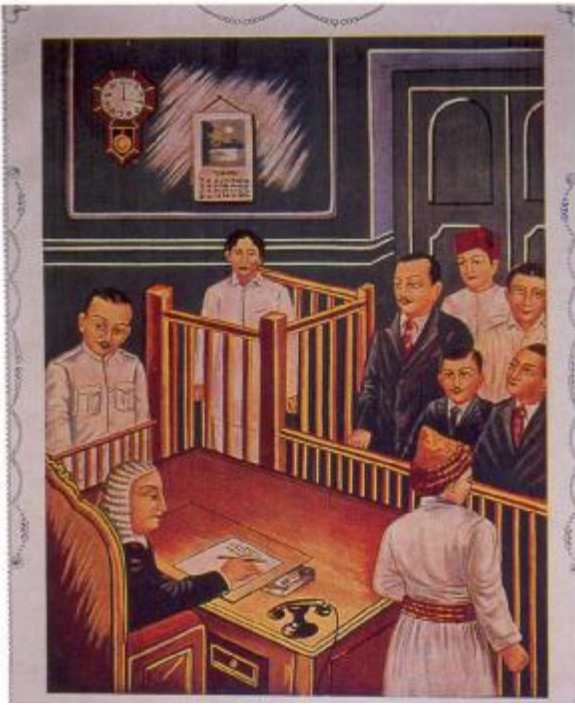
This domain of indeterminate 'political significance' is precisely the domain that 'national figure' comes to occupy.

Perhaps the most striking anti-colonial cross-media artefact was a *dhoti* sold in Calcutta in 1910, on which was printed a song in praise of Khudiram Bose, who had been executed in 1908 (see below). The Bengali text both began and ended with words that are still widely sung in Calcutta: 'Mother, farewell; I shall go to the gallows with a smile.; The people of India will see this.; One bomb can kill a man.; There are lakhs of bombs in our houses.; Mother, what can the English do?'³¹ The appearance of this *dhoti* triggered a surreal debate as to whether it could be considered a 'document' under section 2(6) of the Indian Press Act 1910 (it was finally deemed to be so and Notification no. 1350-P was published in the *Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary*, declaring that all such *dhotis* should be 'forfeited to His Majesty').

This is one of many examples of nationalist signs' continual challenge to the colonial state's ability to categorize and control them. Many Nathdvara images, such as Narottam's *Maharana Pratap* (see illus. 77),

presented a similar, though more successful, challenge: allegory (intentional politics) becomes 'figure' and is mutated into a realm of the unclassifiable, a corporeal domain beyond analysis and constraint. This process can perhaps be seen most clearly in the transformation of the artist Rup Kishor Kapur from allegorist to figuralist. His career is discussed in the next section.

My use of 'figure' here loosely follows the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's use of it to connote a domain where 'meaning is not produced and communicated, but intensities are felt',³² Lyotard invoked 'figure' as the opposite of 'discourse', a domain of the knowable characterized by 'linguistic philosophical closure'. My own usage of 'figure' differs from Lyotard, however, in not assuming the same ontological independence that he grants it. I use it to invoke, in a deliberately flexible manner, the densely compressed performative and the affectively and libidinally charged domain that escapes conventional signification.



KHUDIRAM'S -L.L.

86 *Khudiram's Trial*. c. 1940. Unknown Bengali artist and publisher. A later image depicting events in 1908. Note the clock and calendar at top left.

writing and the telephone to his right, and above all by systems of temporal regularity - the clock and calendar hanging on the wall behind Khudiram.

The image presents what is literally a carpentered universe - the perspectival regularities of the judge's desk expand to trap Khudiram within its wooden constraints, and this space of colonial jurisdiction is further defined through linear rigidities of the background wall and the door, which are arbitrarily truncated by a photographic framing. Unlike the Nathdvara idealized landscapes, whose completeness curls up and around the picture frame, the realist framing of 'Khudiram's Trial' suggests its relation to a continuum of other hostile spaces and this linkage is further suggested by the telephone, whose wire leads



87 Brojen, execution of Khudiram, c. 1930S-40S. Unknown publisher. A barbarous colonial temporality again features prominently.

out of the bottom of the picture, the recipient of the letter the judge is writing and the 'meanwhile' of all the other colonized spaces in which similar clocks tick away in this barbarous and violent 'empty homogenous time'.

Lithographs of Khudiram's execution continue to explore this confrontation with the 'calculating analytic'³⁴ of colonialism. Brojen's image (see illus. 87) traces the causal connection between the judgement shown in the top-right corner and the execution that is the main subject of the image, and counterpoises this on the left with an open doorway. The main part of the Brojen image shares much with a Rising Art Cottage lithograph (illus. 88): the retributive state technology of death is represented in detail, with



88 Khudiram's execution. Rising Art Cottage chromolithograph c. 1940. The British figure on the left times the event precisely.

Khudiram suspended from a wooden frame and his noose controlled by a complex system of pulleys. Other foundations of the colonial state (the gun and the bible) are shown, and controlling the whole event is a red-uniformed, sola-topped English soldier who looks at his watch, synchronizing this particular act of barbarity with a 'meanwhile' of *countless other* brutalities. In the Rising Art Cottage print the technorationalist grid of this barbarity is mapped by the chequered floor and the striations of the brick wall over which, nevertheless, an Indian sky can be seen and thus the immortal can be contrasted with the temporal and corrupt.

'Among those', in the words of the 1918 Rowlatt Sedition Committee Report, 'who united to excuse

Khudiram and to praise the bomb as a weapon of offence against unpopular officials was Tilak', whose connection with the Chitrashala Press from the late 1870s onwards we have already discussed (see chapter 3).³⁵ One of the manifestations of this was an article entitled 'The Country's Misfortune', which appeared in *Kesari*, the Marathi paper that Tilak himself edited, on 12 May 1908. In this, Tilak expressed his sorrow that a country 'which by its very nature is mild and peace-loving' has fallen into a condition akin to European Russia. He noted that even Khudiram felt sorry for the two women he had killed, but that since the partition of Bengal 'the minds of the Bengalis have become most exasperated' and that:

under these circumstances, no one in the world, except the white officials, inebriated with the insolence of authority, will think that not even a very few of the people of Bengal should become turn-headed and feel inclined to commit excesses. Experience shows that even a cat shut up in a house rushes with vehemence upon a person who confines [it there] and tries to kill it,³⁶

It was this article, together with a subsequent piece published on 9 June 1908, bearing a title that translated as 'These remedies are not lasting', that was the official provocation for Tilak's trial in Bombay later in 1908, following which he would be imprisoned for six years. 'These remedies are not lasting' forecast the end of an iniquitous British rule in India. Earlier oppressive and unjust colonizers such as the Mughals, Tilak suggests, prompted discontent and extreme acts of *self-sacrifice* but *no report of this ever reached* 'the ears of the Government'.

In the twentieth century all this had changed: 'turn-headed men' now had access to the bomb and could make everyone sit up and listen. Tilak articulates this historical transformation not simply in terms of the oppressed's new access to weaponry but to the dissemination of a very particular chimerical technology of vernacular bomb-making. 'The bomb', he

Calcutta, to monitor popular chromolithographs for seditious intent. Gupte wrote to Risley that 'Of those I could collect last evening, I feel that *the one printed for a cigarette manufacturer is the most effective and significant*.'⁴² Gupte was referring to a Calcutta Art Studio lithograph of Kali (illus. 90) which had been in circulation in various forms since the late 1870S.⁴³ Gupte was alarmed, although quite why is sometimes hard to discern. He remarked on 'the artistically cunning "modulation" of the caste marks' on Kali's, garland of heads, noting that some lacked these marks, Gupte's conclusions seemingly being that they must be Europeans. **In** a similar vein, Gupte notes 'the symbolical British lion couchant in the. .. N. W. corner, his fall in the N. E. corner and a decapitated *red coated* soldier in the S. E. corner'. 'The falling head near the toes of the prostrate "husband" [Shiv]', he continues, 'leaves no doubt as to the intention of the designer'.⁴⁴ Gupte concludes with the observation that he is 'promised more "editions"', and that they will be forwarded to Risley.⁴⁵ It was Risley's awareness of such 'seditious' material, freely available on the streets of Calcutta, that encouraged him to draft the 1910 Press Act.

For Tilak the sense of a technology that had 'more the form of knowledge' must have had an earlier resonance as the result of his intimate relationship throughout the 1870S and '80S with the picture publisher Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar. Lithography itself, which had been so important in democratizing Indian print culture, might also be considered a technology that has 'more the form of knowledge'.

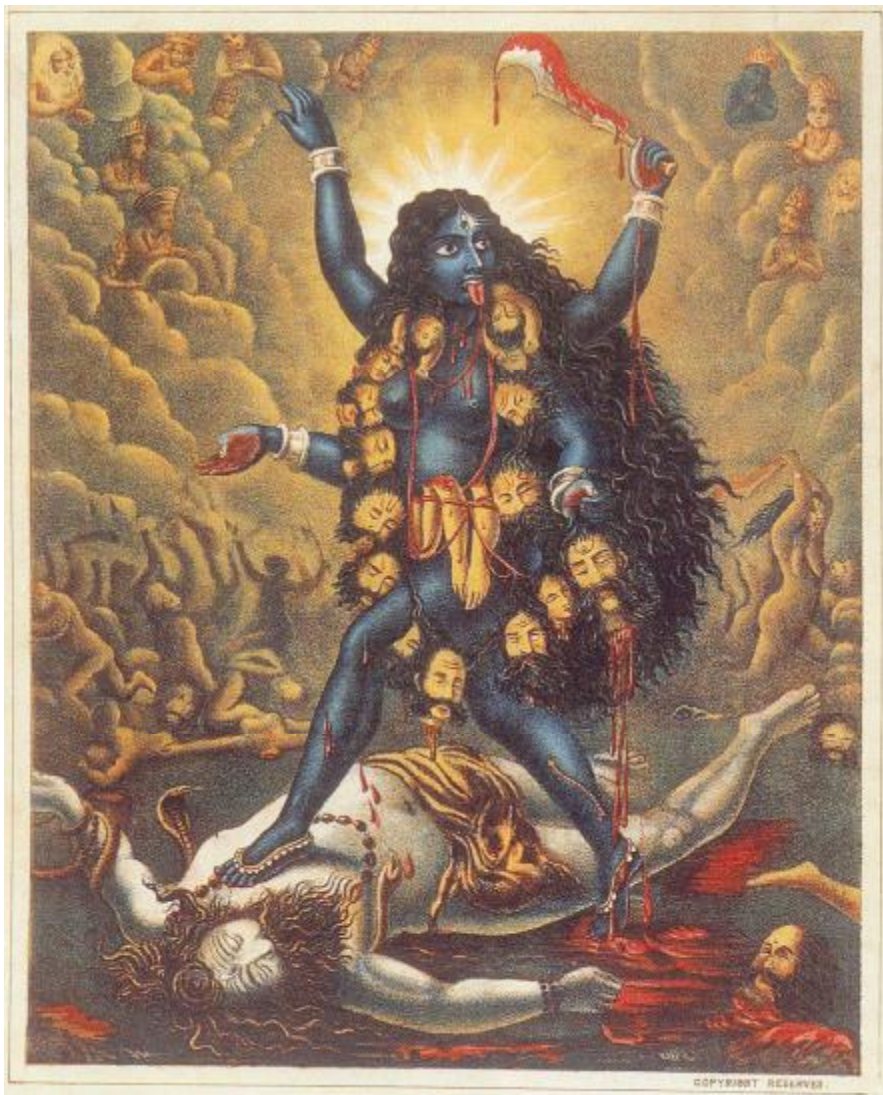
If the bomb was, for Tilak, especially attractive because of its new democratic technology, it was mobilized in counterpoint to a much older weapon - the sword. Like the bomb, the sword embodied a technological simplicity, but it was also a sign that linked the contemporary struggle to a mythic infrastructure that validated the freedom-fighters' actions. We have already seen some aspects of the complex pan-Indian linkages between images of Bhavani's sword that criss-cross from Maharastra to

Bengal and back again, and we will return to this shortly.

The 1908 trial is interesting in another respect: the verbatim proceedings published by Kelkar, the editor of Mahratta, had as its frontispiece a striking studio portrait of Tilak (illus. 89), beneath which was printed Tilak's proclamation that 'In spite of the verdict of the Jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher Powers that rule the destiny of things and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free.' The photograph itself is attributed to 'Phalke and Co. Dadar Bombay'. It is *impossible to be* certain, but it is overwhelmingly likely that this was a



89 Portrait of Tilak by 'Phalke & Co.'. Pasted in photographic frontispiece to N. C. Kelkar's verbatim report on the 1908 trial.



90 Calcutta Art Studio chromolithograph of Kali, collected by B. A. Gupte in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta, in December 1908. The advertising messages around the image urge Indians to buy Kali cigarettes 'to look after the interests of this country's poor and humble workers'.

product of O. G. Phalke's period working as a photographer, before the founding of Lakshmi Art Printing Works, his work for the Ravi Varma Press and his emergence as the 'father' of Indian cinema (see chapter 4). We should recall that it would be Tilak's *Kesari* in which Phalke would announce the nationalist aspiration that had impelled him to make films: the desire to 'see Indian images on the screen'.⁴⁶

Tilak's closeness to another major figure, Lala Lajpat Rai (the 'Punjab Kesari'),⁴⁷ was marked in some visual propaganda. The *Om Arya Kailendar* (illus. 91) for February 1919 pictures them both beneath a swordwielding Mother India. The sword is inscribed 'shakti' and she bears a book inscribed 'vidya' (education). 'Awake brave Indians', the calendar (which was proscribed) implores. Each month of the year delivers a new energizing proclamation:

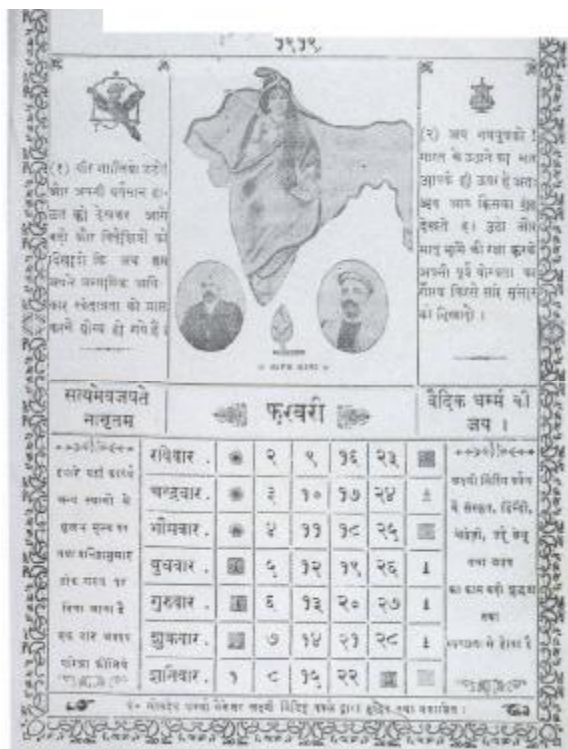
Indians should now give up their natural humbleness . . . we must avoid expressing our demands in doubtful and ambiguous terms.

Arise, Mother India! Awake, Mother India! Wipe the tears from your face! Do not be anxious. Your sons have determined to give their lives for your sake, if you require it.

Be ready with body, mind, wealth and strength to obtain your birth right.⁴⁸

During the widespread opposition to the Simon Commission's arrival in 1928 Lala Lajpat Rai was injured when police charged with lathis and subsequently died. The Intelligence Bureau's *Terrorism in India* 1917-1936 report claimed that his death was 'falsely alleged' to have been 'the result of his having been beaten by the police' but that 'in point of fact L. Lajpat Rai received no injury' at their hands. Contemporary press images, however, suggest the contrary (illus. 92).

The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA), which had been founded two months earlier in September 1928,⁴⁹ then targeted J. A. Scott, the Senior Superintendent of Police in Lahore who was held to



91 *Om Arya Kailendar*, 1919, with vignettes of Tiak and Lala Lajpat Rai beneath Mother India. A proscribed publication.

be guilty of Lajpat Rai's death. On 17 December the HSRA assassinated Assistant Superintendent Saunders whom they mistook for Scott; Rajguru fired at him, causing him to fall from his motorbike, and Bhagat Singh shot Saunders several times as he lay on the ground. Chandra Shekhar Azad killed Head Constable Chanan Singh as they made their escape. Posters subsequently appeared (in Bhagat's handwriting) announcing that 'Saunders is dead, Lalaji is avenged'. Following this Bhagat Singh went to Calcutta, seeking instruction in explosives technology from Jatindra Nath Das.



92 Newspaper image of Lala Lajpat Rai's wounds received while demonstrating against the Simon Commission in 1928 (source unknown). It is these wounds which led to Rai's death, triggering some of the actions of the HSRA.

Further HSRA actions included Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt throwing bombs into the Legislative Assembly in April 1929. Bhagat was arrested, sentenced to death by a Special Tribunal under Ordinance No. III of 1930 and, together with Shukhdev and Rajguru, hanged on 23 March 1931 (illus. 93 & 94). The images of Bhagat Singh's execution complete, with Khudiram, the circle along the other arc of which lies Lala Lajpat Rai and Tilak.

Bhagat Singh's popular appeal was (and still is) enormous, and this is usually presented as an intriguing anomaly: Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography*

is usually cited noting Bhagat's 'sudden and amazing popularity'. The *Terrorism in India* 1917-1936 report also commented on this remarkable popular acclaim:

Public opinion, unsettled by the Civil Disobedience Movement, ran wild and was further excited in favour of the revolutionaries under trial by most of the nationalist newspapers, which painted the accused as oppressed martyrs placed on their trial by an Imperialistic Government for purely patriotic acts. Bhagat Singh especially became a national hero, and his exploits were freely lauded in the nationalist press, so that, for a time, he bade fair to oust Mr. Gandhi as the foremost political figure of the day. His photograph was to be met with in many houses, and his plaster busts found a large market.

50

Bhagat Singh has also been the subject of numerous chromolithographs since 1931 and of several films: Jagdish Gautama's *Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh* (1954); K. N. Bansal's *Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (1963); S. Ram Sharma's famous hit *Shaheed* (1965), starring Manoj Kumar; and most recently Rajkumar Santoshi's *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002). At the time of writing there are a further three films on Bhagat due for release.

Bhagat remains prominent in many South Asians' consciousness: I. K. Gujral's speech on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence commenced with his 'gratitude [to] those innumerable martyrs who suffered in jail', and he then listed Ashfaq, Bismil, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukhdev. The Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Pirabakaran, interviewed by a Jaffna literary magazine in April 1994 and quizzed as to what had impelled him to take up arms against oppression, replied that 'I developed a deep attachment to the Indian freedom struggle and martyrs like Subhash Chandra Bose, B[h]agat Singh and [Balgangadhar] Tilak'. And this celebration by national figures has been reciprocated consistently at a grass-roots level. Thus, for instance, in November 1998 the Chandigarh

93 Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukhdev, anonymous print c. 1931. Watched over by Nehru and Gandhi at the top of the image. the three martyrs are depicted within a tomb to sacrifice.



94 Lahore Case Conspiracy Decision. c. 1931. The main protagonists offer their heads to Mother India on the left. Krishna hovers above and on the right a ship takes revolutionaries across the Bay of Bengal to incarceration in the Andaman Islands.



KK: 'T'ilm
J. P. CoJR. ...
"ftr; ;;;St~ ('Ifj'
Shahud Bhagot Singh

95 Shaheed Bhagat Singh. c. 1940. A later colour version that develops Rup Kishor Kapur's iconography. Published by Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta.

Bharatiya Vidyalaya celebrated its Annual Day (with Finance Minister Kanwaljit Singh presiding) by staging a play: *Bhagat Singh, Prince among Martyrs*.⁵³ Continuing buoyant sales for H. R. Raja's images (see chapter 7) suggest that this popular enthusiasm is pervasive, especially in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.⁵⁴

Bhagat Singh's huge popularity is on the face of it very surprising, indeed it is one of the puzzles of twentieth-century Indian history. The HSRA represented the antithesis of Gandhianism not only because of its commitment to violence, but also in its militant atheism. This, as Sumit Sarkar notes, was most marked in Bhagat Singh (the HSRA member who most captured the popular imagination), who was 'marked by an increasingly deep commitment to Marxian

socialism and - equally remarkable, perhaps, given the strong Hindu religiosity of the earlier terrorists - militant atheism'.⁵⁵ Bhagat Singh's remarkable prison notebooks, which have been published recently, provide ample testament to his rigorous materialist mind.⁵⁶

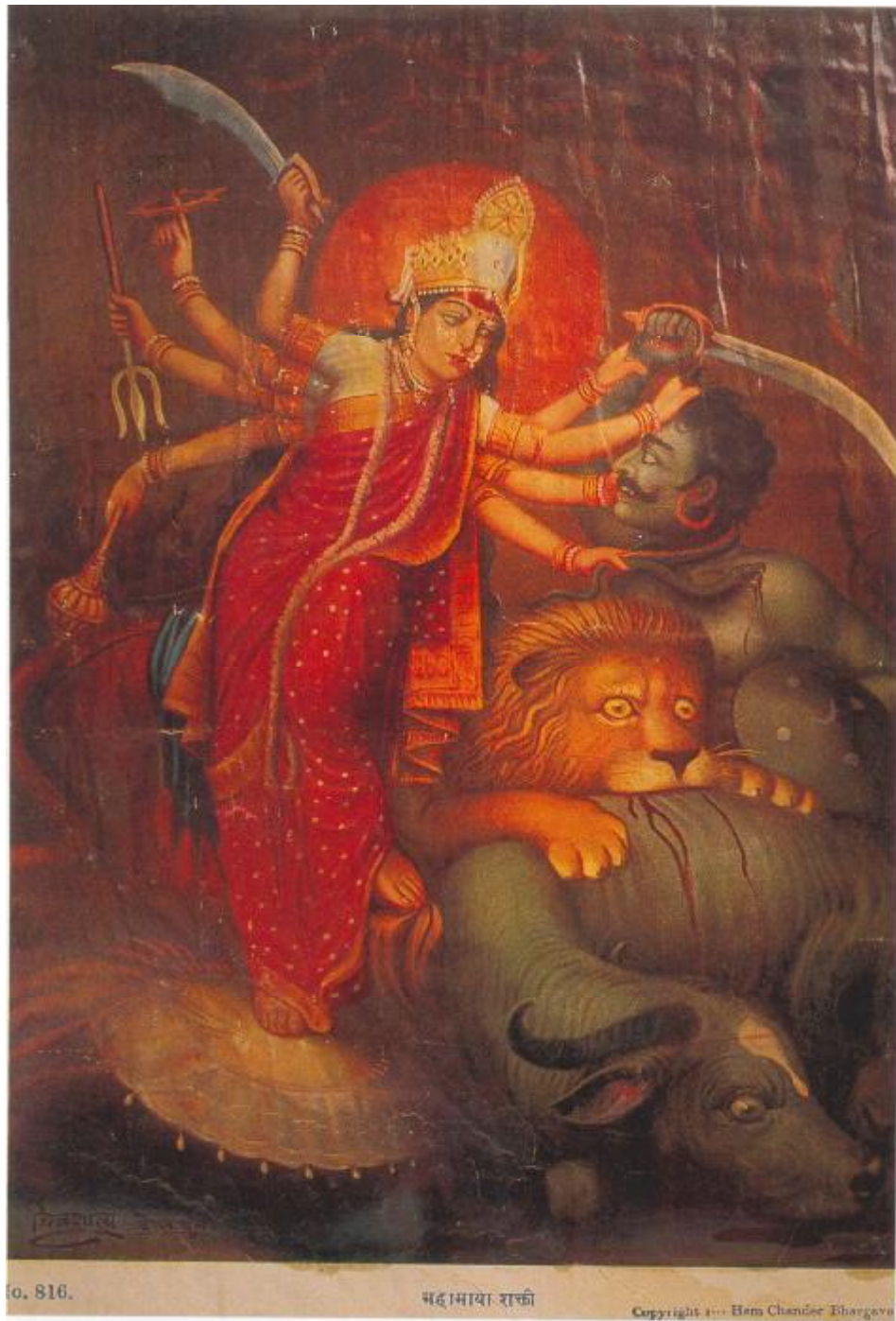
But this puzzle can be partly unravelled by attending to the images themselves and their chief feature: the trilby. In so doing we will find an echo of Tilak's trope of the bomb as 'a practice of knowledge' in Bhagat Singh's audacious mimicry. The trilby will emerge as the chief sign of Bhagat's ability to 'pass'.

Since the first popular images of him appeared in 1931, Bhagat has nearly always been depicted wearing a trilby. Although born into a Jat Sikh family and returning to the turban just prior to his execution, under the influence of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh,⁵⁷ his popular visual incarnation has nearly always been as a mimic of the English sahib. His trilby, it transpires, has a historical explanation: pursued by the police, Bhagat Singh escaped disguised as a wealthy official.⁵⁸ J. N. Sanyal's proscribed 1931 publication gives this account:

He dressed up as a young Government official, adopted a big official name, put labels on his trunk and portmanteau~ and in the company of a beautiful lady, entrained a first class compartment at the Central Railway station in the face of those very cm officials who were specially deputed to arrest the assassin of Mr Saunders. ⁵⁹

Sanyal, we should remember, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for the publication of this book. Other key texts in the Bhagat cult, such as those by K. K. Khullar⁶⁰ and Manmath Nath Gupta, concur in emphasizing this episode. Gupta explains that Chandra Shekhar Azad, who is commonly represented with Bhagat, had to adopt a different disguise:

Chandrashekhar Azad, owing to his unique personality, could not fit into this bourgeois set up.



98 *Mahamaya Shakti*, 'Chitrashala Oehradun' (Rup Kishor Kapur and Kalicharan) c. 1940S. Published by Hem Chander Bhargava.

